

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I too wish to say a few words about our departed colleague. The first thing to say is that we are sorry, first and foremost, to the family and also to the staff of Senator BYRD for their loss. The next thing to say is that it is a sad day for the Senate. Everybody who has been here for a while has a few ROBERT BYRD stories. A couple come to mind I thought I would share.

Along with Senator REID and Senator DODD, who were here on the floor earlier, Senator BYRD, in the early part of the decade, responded to my request to come down to the University of Louisville, my alma mater, to speak to the students and to a broader audience. At his age and particularly given the fact that I was a member of the opposition party, there was, frankly, no particular reason for him to do that. But he did and made an extraordinary impression on the students and inconvenienced himself on my behalf, which I always appreciated.

My second—and really my favorite—recollection of Senator BYRD, I found myself a few years ago in a curious position, at variance with virtually everybody on my side of the aisle. I had reflexively, as I think many Members had, responded negatively to a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in the late 1980s essentially holding that flag burning was a permissible first amendment expression of political speech. The first time that amendment came before the Senate, I voted for it. Then I began to have some pangs of discomfort about my position. Having spent a good portion of my political career focusing on political speech and the first amendment, I, frankly, decided I was wrong and in subsequent votes have opposed it.

A few years ago, it became clear it was going to be defeated in the Senate by the narrowest of margins. I remembered that Senator BYRD was always carrying around a Constitution in his pocket and had a feeling that upon reflection, he might reach the same conclusion I did. So I lobbied Senator BYRD. I thought initially it would be a futile act, but he reexamined his position. As a result, he too changed his position, and as it turns out, there was not a vote to spare the last time the Senate considered whether it would be appropriate to amend the first amendment for the first time in the history of the country to kind of carve a niche out of it to make it possible to punish an act we all find despicable. But, nevertheless, the most unfortunate of

speech is probably what the first amendment was all about initially. So Senator BYRD did change his position. There was not a vote to spare, and the amendment was defeated. And from my point of view, the first amendment was saved on that important occasion.

We will all remember Senator BYRD for a variety of different things. As the majority leader pointed out, he was a unique individual in so many different ways. Those are two of my favorite stories about ROBERT BYRD.

More than anyone else in any of our lifetimes, ROBERT BYRD embodied the Senate. He not only wrote the book on it, he was a living repository of its rules, its customs, and its prerogatives. So it would be a mistake to think that Senator BYRD became synonymous with the Senate simply because he served in it longer than anybody else. Rather, it was a fitting coincidence that a man who cherished and knew this place so well would become its longest serving Member.

Yet it is probably true that he will be remembered above all for his longevity.

Everyone seems to have a different way of communicating just how long a time he spent here. For me, it is enough to note that ROBERT BYRD had already spent nearly 20 years serving in elected office in West Virginia and in the House of Representatives before he was elected to the U.S. Senate during the Eisenhower administration.

And over the years, he would walk the floor with 4 future Presidents, 4 of the 12 he would serve alongside in a 57-year career in Congress. I won't enumerate all the legislative records Senator BYRD held, but I would venture to say that the figure that probably made him proudest of all was the nearly 70 years of marriage he spent with a coal miner's daughter named Erma.

If he was synonymous with the Senate, he was no less synonymous with West Virginia. Here is how popular ROBERT BYRD was in his home State: In the year ROBERT BYRD was first elected to the U.S. Senate, 1958, he won with 59 percent of the vote, a margin that most people around here would consider a landslide. In a record 9 Senate elections, it was the smallest margin of victory he would ever get.

Members will offer tributes of their own in the coming days.

I will close with this. Last year, in becoming the longest serving Member of Congress in history, Senator BYRD surpassed another legendary figure, Carl Hayden of Arizona. Hayden was known to many as the "silent Senator," a phrase few would use to describe Senator BYRD.

But what the two men shared was a devotion to the United States and, in particular, to the legislative branch of our Government, which the founders envisioned and established as coequal with the other two.

A few years ago, Senator BYRD's official portrait was unveiled at an event in the Old Senate Chamber. And I

think that portrait pretty well sums up the image Senator BYRD wanted to leave of himself. It is the image of a dignified man, in the classical mold, supported by three things: the Bible, the U.S. Constitution, and his wife. A lot of people looked at Senator BYRD's record-long tenure in Congress, his immense knowledge of poetry, history, and the Senate, and wondered where he got the strength. With this painting, he gave us the answer. He showed us the anchors.

As I noted at that ceremony, Senator BYRD once wrote that if the question was whether to be loved or respected, he always chose to be respected. Yet his real accomplishment is that, in the end, he managed to be both.

So I join my colleagues, my fellow Americans, the people of West Virginia, and the Byrd family today in remembering our colleague. We will surely miss him.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, on this day, West Virginia has lost probably its most prominent son and the Senate has lost probably its most able statesman. For myself, I have lost an admired colleague and a treasured friend. More than nine decades of a remarkable life and five decades as an accomplished public servant in the Senate only serve as one form of proof that ROBERT C. BYRD was and always will be an icon, particularly in his own State. A man of great character, faith, intellect, who rose to the heights of power, yet never forgot where he came from, his story holds such a profoundly significant place in both West Virginia and American history. But it was in the coalfields of southern West Virginia where a young ROBERT C. BYRD first gained the skills, the moral character, the toughness, and the shrewdness that would make him a truly great man.

After his mother passed away, he was raised by his aunt and uncle, a coalminer, he movingly called "the most remarkable man I have ever been privileged to know." From them Senator BYRD learned early in life what it meant to be loyal, to have a ferocious work ethic, really almost beyond imagination, and possess a deep faith in God. And it was these values—these innately West Virginia values, I argue—that guided his every action and made him such a unique and strong fighter for our State and who got such joy in doing that fight.

He was proud of West Virginia. He was proud of his ideals. He was proud of the service he could render to the people from whom he came. He believed with all of his heart that our breathtaking mountains, our rivers, and our deep valleys, and especially our well-rooted people, who face adversity always and face it with strength and courage, make our State a place like quite none other in the world.